

RELEASE IN FULL

Thinking About Anti-Semitism in Europe

**“Conference on Fighting Anti-Semitism in Europe:
What is Next?”**

Ambassador Howard Gutman

November 30, 2011

Mr. _____ :

**I am delighted and honored to
get a chance both to meet all of
you and to share some thoughts
on the issue of anti-Semitism
today in Europe.**

**First, a couple of apologies.
When I was asked to speak, I**

did not realize that I would be slated to do an “Opening” or “Welcome.” And the topic today is too important to dally too long with welcomes.

So welcome. If you are new to Belgium, the frites, chocolate, beer and mussels are terrific and have only the oval waffles called Liege waffles, put no toppings on them, and get them straight from the waffle iron.

OK. So much for welcomes.

The second apology is an apology in advance for my not saying what you would expect me to say. You see, the temptation always exists at conferences discussing perceived biases, prejudices, discrimination and even hatred, to cite a couple of anecdotal instances of violence or hatred, sound an alarm, rally a response, take the applause and sit down.

But to me, the issues are too complex and too much in flux to

simply take the easy path. This topic is too important and the time of each of you is too valuable to simply use this meeting as a group opportunity to decry hatred. Of course, we and all well-meaning among the brotherhood of man must decry hatred. But that is just the starting point, not the end of the discussion.

So I likely will not just say fully what you expected and or maybe hoped to hear. I respect all of you too much to do that.

But let's start with some context. Who am I and from what background do I approach these issues?

My story is not that atypical for the United States – it is in fact right at the core of the American dream. My father, Gitman Mogilnicki, grew up in a Polish town of Biala Rawska. As the Germans began to pressure the Poles, he left the town to try to join the Resistance. Having been rejected by the Resistance for looking too Jewish and having been gone but a week,

he returned to find that the Jewish section of the town no longer existed. He spent the war with a few other escapees in the woods, never being caught, sleeping in dug out graves to avoid the bullets when the Germans fired along the ground, and stealing food in the middle of the night by risking missions to town.

He often wondered whether any from the town of Biala Rawska had been taken to camps rather than just having been slaughtered on the spot.

But having spent the years after the war searching in vain for even one survivor, he finally concluded that, had the town been taken to camps rather than being killed then and there, surely one person would have survived. There was simply no one left.

Having searched in vain for both survivors and employment in Warsaw and Berlin until 1950, he decided to come to the United States and start again. But the United States had quotas limiting the

number of immigrants from Poland. So my father arranged illegally to purchase a false passport in which he transposed his first and last names, and Gitman Mogilnicki of Biala Rawska Poland became Mosher Gutman first of Danzig and then Max Gutman of the Bronx, New York, and the garment district in the lower East Side of Manhattan.

Carrying forward with the next-generation-make-good story, I attended public schools. My father died when I was 16, never having discussed the war

with me and never having told me even his real name. Upon his death, I went to work after school cleaning tables in a restaurant and through the student loan program, I attended Columbia University and then Harvard Law School. Having finished among the top of my class, I then clerked on our highest court, the United States Supreme Court, an honor given to the top roughly 40 law school graduates a year, I spent two years as a Special Assistant to the Director of the FBI for counterintelligence and counter-

terrorism, and 27 years as a lawyer at a leading law firm and as an advisor to government officials and Democratic political candidates for office. I was on the Board of the Washington Hebrew Home for seniors and a member of two different shuls in Washington DC -- a reform shul and an Orthodox shul.

During the Presidential campaign of Barack Obama, I participated in a lot of activities including policy, speechwork, press, fundraising and more. One of my efforts was working

with the Jewish vote. Though there was much support in the Jewish community during the campaign, I combated significant suspicion and concern among the Jewish community as to whether a black man named Barack Hussein Obama could really be a good friend for Israel and the Jewish community.

And since I have come to Belgium, I have made my story well known and it has been well received by all. I have engaged at great lengths with the Jewish communities, giving speeches in

Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia and even before the World Jewish Congress on Barack Obama's relationship with the Jewish community and the Middle East. The speech, which argues that by becoming credible in the Arab world, President Obama has become Israel's best and most valuable friend, is on our website and is available to any who are interested. And I appear regularly at Jewish community events such as memorials, tributes and celebrations.

I have engaged at great length as well with Muslim communities. I have done significant outreach with the largely Moroccan and Turkish communities throughout Belgium -- in Molenbeeck, in Anderlecht, in Hasselt and many other areas. Today alone, I met with leaders of a Flemish nationalist party to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian problem and the effect on the U.S. position with regard to UNESCO and other U.N. organizations, and with the largest mosque in Belgium to talk about the same

topic and East-West relations. I host at my Residence an annual Iftar, last September sharing dinner in my ballroom with 180 leaders of the Muslim communities. I have available in fact copies of a column that was written two years ago by the former Mayor of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, who was then the Saudi Ambassador to Belgium, talking about the advances of the Obama administration in East-West relationships following his participation at one of our Iftars.

And I follow closely and think often about issues of anti-Semitism in Europe. In the past few months, Jacques Brotchi, a Federal Senator and leading neurosurgeon, quit his affiliation with a Brussels university over issues of anti-Semitism and we are in the process of following up on those developments. We have been following up since last week when a Jewish female student was beaten up at a Belgian school by other students spewing racial epithets.

To some extent, I have unique exposure to these issues. And such exposure has left me convinced how complicated and changing this issue is. Generalizations about anti-Semitism in Europe are dangerous indeed – always at risk of oversimplifying and of lumping together diverse phenomena.

So let's start the analysis with the clearest and easiest departure point. There is and has long been some amount of anti-Semitism, of hatred and violence against Jews, from a

small sector of the population who hate others who may be different or perceived to be different, largely for the sake of hating. Those anti-Semites are people who hate not only Jews, but Muslims, gays, gypsies, and likely any who can be described as minorities or different. That hatred is of course pernicious and it must be combated. We can never take our eye off it or just dismiss it as fringe elements or the work of crazy people, because we have seen in the past how it can foment and grow. And it is that hatred

that lawyers like you can work vigilantly to expose, combat and punish, maybe in conjunction with existing human rights groups.

I have not personally seen much of that hatred in Europe, though it rears its ugly head from time to time. I do not have any basis to think it is growing in any sense. But of course, we can never take our eye off of it, and you particularly as lawyers can help with that process.

So in some sense, that is the easy part of the analysis.

Let's turn to the harder and more complex part.

What I do see as growing, as gaining much more attention in the newspapers and among politicians and communities, is a different phenomena. It is the phenomena that led Jacques Brotchi to quit his position on the university committee a couple of months ago and that led to the massive attention last week when the Jewish female student was beaten up. It is the problem within Europe of tension, hatred and sometimes even violence between some

members of Muslim communities or Arab immigrant groups and Jews. It is a tension and perhaps hatred largely born of and reflecting the tension between Israel, the Palestinian Territories and neighboring Arab states in the Middle East over the continuing Israeli-Palestinian problem.

It too is a serious problem. It too must be discussed and solutions explored. No Jewish student – and no Muslim student or student of any heritage or religion – should ever feel intimidated on a University

campus for their heritage or religion leading to academic leaders quitting in protest. No high school or grammar school Jewish student – and no Muslim high school or grammar school student or student of any heritage or religion – should be beaten up over their heritage or religion.

But this second problem is in my opinion different in many respects than the classic bigotry – hatred against those who are different and against minorities generally -- the type of anti-Semitism that I

discussed above. It is more complex and requiring much more thought and analysis. This second form of what is labeled “growing anti-Semitism” produces strange phenomena and results.

Thus for example, I have been received well by Belgians everywhere in this country. I always get polite applause and sometimes more.

But the longest and loudest ovation I have ever received in Belgium came from the high school with one of the largest percentages of students of Arab

heritage. It was in Molenbeek. It consisted of an audience dominated by girls with head scarves and boys named Mohammed, standing and cheering boisterously for a Jewish American, who belongs to two schuls and whose father was a Holocaust survivor. Let me just share a minute or two with you of a video clip from that visit.

These kids were not anti-Semitic as I have ever thought of the term. And I get a similar reaction as I engage with imans, at Iftars, and with Muslims

**communities throughout
Belgium.**

And yet, I know and I hear at the same time that the cheering occurs for this Jew, that within that same school and audience at Molenbeek, among those at the same Iftars, and throughout the Muslim communities that I visit, and indeed throughout Europe, there is significant anger and resentment and, yes, perhaps sometimes hatred and indeed sometimes and all too growing intimidation and violence directed at Jews generally as a result of the

continuing tensions between Israel and the Palestinian territories and other Arab neighbors in the Middle East.

This is a complex problem indeed. It requires its own analysis and solutions. And the analysis I submit is not served simply by lumping the problem with past instances of anti-Jewish beliefs and actions or those that exist today among minority haters under a uniform banner of “anti-Semitism.”

It is I believe this area where community leaders – Jewish, Muslim, and third parties—where

diplomats and religious leaders, where lawyers and professionals from both communities, where mothers and fathers, where university leaders and school administrators, can make the most difference by working to limit converting political and military tension in the Middle East into social problems in Europe. But it is the area too – both fortunately and unfortunately -- where the largest part of the solution remains in the hands of government leaders in Israel and the Palestinian territories

and Arab countries in the Middle East. It is the area where every new settlement announced in Israel, every rocket shot over a border or suicide bomber on a bus, and every retaliatory military strike exacerbates the problem and provides a setback here in Europe for those fighting hatred and bigotry here in Europe.

I said that it is both fortunate and unfortunate that the largest part of the solution for this second type of problem – too often lumped under a general

banner of anti-Semitism – is in the hands of Israel, the Palestinians and Arab neighbors in the Middle East. It is fortunate because it means that, unlike traditional hatred of minorities, a path towards improving and resolving it does at least exist. It is crucial for the Middle East – but it is crucial for the Jewish and Arab communities in Europe and for countries around the globe – that Mid-East peace negotiations continue, that settlements abate, and that progress towards a lasting

peace be made and then such a peace reached in the Middle East. Were a lasting peace in the Middle East to be reached, were joint and cooperative Israeli-Arab attentions turned to focus instead on such serious, common threats such as Iran, this second type of ethnic tension and bigotry here in Europe – which is clearly growing today – would clearly abate. I can envision the day when it disappears. Peace in the Middle East would indeed equate with a huge reduction of

this form of labeled “anti-Semitism” here in Europe.

It is at the same time somewhat unfortunate that most of the cause and thus most of the solution for tension and hatred in Europe, for growing problems at Belgian universities, for epithets in the streets, rest with governments and people a continent away. For, in some respect, citizens, parents, religious and community leaders here in Europe can simply try to promote understanding and patience, while ensuring law enforcement serves its mission,

**without being able fully to
address the most root causes
and most efficient cures.**

**It is a challenge for us all. I
hope it is one you will address in
this conference.**

**Thanks so much and all the
best.**